

HAND-HELD FOOD PROCESSOR

TECHNICAL FIELD

A hand-held, hand-powered food processor, such as, a chopper, peeler, mixer or a combination of any of the foregoing and a unique drive for such a hand-held food processor. A peeler for garlic or like food products.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Hand-held, hand-powered food processors are known and all basically rotate a spindle to which is connected some form of cutting, beating, or mixing arms. Some of these processors use a hand crank for the drive to rotate the spindle. The Yip patent 5,996,483 is an example. These types of drives for the spindle are often expensive, lack torque, or do not give a long enough pulse of rotation to the spindle for effective action on the food to be processed. Thus, it is one feature of this invention to provide a unique drive for rotating the spindle of a hand-held food processor.

The Yip patent, mentioned above, shows a garlic peeling and peanut shelling processor that uses a rigid beater to throw garlic at a series of vertical ribs spaced along the circumference of a retaining cylinder to break the skin of the garlic.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention is directed to a hand-held hand-powered food processor. In some embodiments the processor can have a peeler arm. In other embodiments the processor can have a chopper blade. The chopper blade embodiment can also mix and emulsify salad dressings in a convenient manner. It is an advantage of this hand-held hand-powered processor that small amounts of food can be processed for small or individual servings as compared to an electric table top food processor designed for large quantities of food to be processed. The hand-held hand-powered food processor can have interchangeable arms or blades thus being converted from a peeler to a chopper or mixer. In any embodiment it is a unique feature of the invention to drive the spindle of the

processor with a pull-motor of a type similar to the starter motor on a model airplane or an outboard motor. The pull-motor has been found to uniquely provide a long pulse of rotational power to the spindle [several full rotations] all at a high torque. Thus, with one long pull of the pull-motor cord, the spindle of the hand-held food processor can exert a long and high torque rotational force on the spindle. This long pulse and high torque is particularly advantageous for chopping vegetables or peeling garlic and the drive is accomplished without the need or expense of batteries.

Another feature of the invention is a garlic peeler that is usable in the hand-held hand-powered food processor, battery powered processor, or can be used in a larger table top electrically powered food processor. Basically this peeler utilizes at least one and preferably two elastomeric flexible arms or rods that engage the garlic cloves to be peeled and rub the skin off the garlic clove. In one embodiment a long rib is used to hold the garlic as it is peeled. A stop block keeps the garlic from spinning around with the rotary arms. By rubbing the skin off the garlic, the peeled garlic clove is left in a solid condition afterward making it more attractive for use in cooking.

Another feature is the use of the cover in a hand-held food processor as a collection dish for the food products in the processor and for holding the food products on a table or counter top.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is an isometric view of a hand-held hand-powered food processor.

Figure 2 is an axial cross section of the food processor shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3 is an exploded view of the food processor.

Figure 4 is a partial fragmentary section of another embodiment showing the food processor without a long rib.

Figure 5 is an other embodiment showing the food processor schematically with a conventional battery or other electrical motor drive.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

A hand-held hand-powered food processor 10, includes an axial end cup or food holder 12 fitted in an axial end housing 14. While the description of the details of the invention will be described with reference to a hand-held, hand-powered food processor, it should be understood that the peeler version of the invention may also be used advantageously as a separate device for use in larger electrically powered table top food processors.

A palm grip or table support member 16 is attached to the end housing 14. The support member is made of rubber and can either be held in the palm of the hand when the processor is being held only in the hands or can be rested on a table or counter when the processor is used in the upright position as shown in Figure 2. The end housing is formed with a gasket 18 and a locking collar 20. The food holder 12, gasket and locking collar are all bonded together. The locking collar has locking slots 22 that mesh with ribs 23 on a cover 24. The cover is thus attached and sealed by inserting the locking ribs into the locking slots and giving a relative twist between the cover and the end housing in a well-known manner. The food holder has an end surface 28 and a sidewall 32. A long rib 30 is formed on the end surface. A small stop block 34 is attached to the sidewall. When the processor is held with the support member down as in Figures 2 and 5, it can be seen that the rib 30 and stop block 34 are both positioned near the vertical center line of the cup. This allows food in the processor to accumulate by gravity over the stop block and adjacent the long rib to enhance contact between the arm 40 (described below) and the food in the cup 12. The food is thus subjected to more shearing action between the arm when the arm is a chopper (as described below) or more peeling action when the arm is a peeling arm (also described below). The preferred position for use of the processor is thus as shown in Figure 2 but the processor can also be held in other positions. A drive shaft 36 extends through a collar 37 fixed to the end surface of the food holder and is sealed with an o-ring 38. The drive shaft has a radial right angle notch 43. The hub has a key 45 that fits into the notch and is thus drivingly but removably connected to the drive shaft.

The cover 24 also has a uniform outer periphery 25 which serves as a base to support the cover on a table or counter top when the cover is removed from the food processor. In this manner chopped foods, peeled garlic, or blended liquid dressings can be deposited into the cover by removing the cover from an underside or bottom position on the processor. Thus the contents of the processor will fall down into the cover which can then be removed and placed on the table or counter top for holding the contents of the processor.

An arm 40 is attached to a hub 42. A second arm 44 axially spaced from the first arm is also attached to the hub. The first arm that lies closer to the widest part or center of the cup and cover is slightly longer than the second arm. The arms have ends 40a and 44a (Figure 3) that are spaced closely from the stop block 34. The arms are generally convex on their forward surface in plan view and each has a forward facing roughened surface 41 in the direction of rotation of the arms. In Figure 3, the roughened surface is transverse grooves but other roughed or textured surfaces can also be used. The elastomeric material itself can be of a sticky type. The purpose of the forward facing surfaces is to engage the skin of the food to be peeled, such as garlic cloves, and rub against the skin to dislodge it from the garlic clove. The stop block 34 serves to stop the garlic from freely spinning around in the cup. The long rib 30 also tends to hold the garlic and allow the arms to rub against the garlic so held by the rib.

The action of the arms or only one arm, such as arm 44, can successfully peel garlic but the use of two arms provides improved and more effective peeling action. The long rib 30 is also not essential, as shown in Figure 4, but the use of this rib also speeds up the peeling action. When a rib 30 is used the gap between the top of the rib 30a and the confronting surfaces 40b or 44b of the arms 40 and 44 is preferably between 0.050 and 0.150 inches. Thus, the preferred peeler is to have two arms 40 and 44, the long rib 30, and the stop block 34 but it should be understood that the invention encompasses the use of only one arm and without a long rib on the end surface of the food holder. It is also believed that even the stop block can be eliminated if the arms are used in an electrically powered food processor. When the power is manual, the shorter period for peeling is more

important than if the power to rotate the drive shaft is an electric motor that can run for a longer period of time. The elastomeric arms are made of a flexible elastomeric material having a durometer of between Shore A 60 and Shore A 100 and preferably a durometer of between Shore A 80 and Shore A 82.

5 The propulsion for the drive shaft is a unique manually powered pull cord motor having a pulley 48 rotatably mounted on a post 50. The pulley has a square recess 52 in which is fitted a toothed ratchet wheel 54. The ratchet wheel is biased outwardly (to the right in Figure 3) by a disc spring 56. The teeth of the ratchet wheel mesh in a driving direction with mating teeth in the drive shaft 36. But reverse rotation of the pulley allows
10 the teeth of the ratchet wheel to slide past the teeth of the drive shaft. The pulley has a slot 60, the housing has a slot 62, and a coiled strip spring 63 has its ends fitted in the slots, in a well know manner, and provides the return rotation to the pulley. Thus, the unidirectional rotational motion of the drive shaft is accomplished in the hand-powered version of the food processor by a pull cord 65 having several wraps around the pulley.
15 The pull cord has a handle 66. The advantage of this pull cord type of rotational drive or motor is that the elastomeric arms are run at a high torque and at a high velocity (over 500 rpm) for several revolutions (about 5 or 6) from each pull of the handle 66. These rotations are for a relatively long rotational period. The arms have little mass and thus will stop prematurely when engaging the food in the processor unless the pull cord type of
20 motor applies the high torque and long duration of rotation. Of course, an electrically powered drive motor, as shown in Figure 5, can have a high torque and a long period of rotational power so the duration of rotation, high torque, and velocity needed in a hand-powered motor is less important for an electrically powered motor.

25 While the invention has been described as a peeler, the food processor can also be used as a chopper. However, it should be understood that the peeler version has utility and purpose either alternatively with the chopper or as an independent peeler. The chopper utilizes rigid arms 70 and 72 having sharpened forward facing cutting blades 70a and 72a. The chopper arms are also attached to a hub 42 that can also be drivingly and removably engaged with the drive shaft 36. When used as a chopper the rib 30 has the

additional function of deflecting the cut or chopped food so that it gets thrown up again into the path of the rotating chopping blades. This function helps to speed up the cutting action and causes the food to be cut into smaller and smaller pieces. The combination of the stop block and the long rib creates a shearing action with the blades to increase the chopping speed and creates more uniformly smaller chopped pieces.

The chopper can also be used as a mixer and has been found to rapidly mix oils and vinegars or other salad dressing ingredients in small quantities. The chopper has been found to emulsify the oil and vinegar to better blend the dressing.

In the one form of the chopper or peeler the processor comes with both chopper blades and with peeler arms so that they can be used interchangeably. Thus, a user can peel garlic, then after removing the skins from the food holder, add other foods and further chop the peeled garlic, and chop the other added foods. A dressing can then be blended for a small salad ready to serve.

Figure 5 shows the food processor but with a battery powered, unidirectional electric motor 90 substituted for the pull cord motor and one way drive.

From the foregoing it will be appreciated that, although specific embodiments of the invention have been described herein for purposes of illustration, various modifications may be made without deviating from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the invention is not limited except as by the appended claims.